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## THE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

## THE COSMOLOGY OF WILLIAM JAMES

## I

WILLIAM JAMES clarified and illumined psychology and philosophy more inspiringly than any other man of recent generations; and in doing this he furnished momentous guidance for all future efforts to solve the fundamental problems of mankind.

A proper review of James's work as a whole would justify this estimate of him; and would most richly emphasize the tribute that mankind owes to his genius. Such a complete review should be made. But it would be too long for my present space. And I will examine, here, only his main conceptions of the universe.

Two of these main conceptions James stated definitely: The entire universe is constituted solely of "one general sort of stuff." And it is a "Plural Universe." There can be no doubt that by "Plural Universe," James meant a universe comprising many minds; and as distinguished from a universe declared to comprise one "Absolute Mind." But this does not preclude the possibility that James conceived certain stuff and things to exist, not in any mind. And often he used language difficult to interpret otherwise than in accord with such a conception. True, he sometimes declared that he always dealt with "Berkeleyan things" only; and seemed by this to imply that no things ever exist save as components of one or more minds. Nevertheless, one's chief difficulty in studying James's writings is that of reconciling his many declarations.

As to what James meant by "a mind," he often used the phrase in ways implying two fundamentally different sorts of minds, or in ways hard to interpret in any one meaning. And these I now proceed to consider, inasmuch as they double the difficulty of discovering how James presumed any one mind to be distinguished from more than one, and every mind to be distinguished from every other mind—whatever the sort or sorts of minds be involved—and because they greatly increase the difficulty of discovering how James divided the "one sort of stuff" in the universe—whether wholly between "plural" minds of one sort or another, or in a way leaving some of the stuff in no mind.

One of the two meanings of "the mind" possibly implied by

James is one that he seems generally to have used when identifying the mind with what he also called "the stream of thought"; and when so using this meaning, James seems intentionally to have described the mind or stream so involved, as being constituted of stuff primarily and commonly destitute of consciousness and requiring something other than itself in order to become conscious occasionally. Moreover, James seems to have implied the quite other meaning of "the mind" only when speaking of such conscious occasions; and he deliberately declared consciousness to be a something that "comes in" at a distinct stage of biologic evolution, thus making doubtful how he conceived prior minds if he conceived any. Therefore, by way of discovering how James divided his "one sort of stuff" into his "Plural Universe" and what sort of mind or minds he did or did not wittingly conceive for that purpose, I now turn to his teachings regarding consciousness.

In James's paper "Does Consciousness Exist?" he declared that consciousness does not exist, but is an "act of addition or appropriation"; and defined consciousness to be "awareness of one's being added to that being."

One wonders how "awareness" can be "added," yet not "exist"! And as he used a certain "pen-experience" for expounding his theme, I quote what his paper says about this experience: "To be 'conscious' means not simply to be, but to be reported, known, to have awareness of one's being added to that being; and this is just what happens when the appropriative experience supervenes. The pen-experience in its original immediacy is not aware of itself, it simply *is*, and the second experience is required for what we call awareness of it to occur. It is indeed 'mine' only as it is felt as mine, and is 'yours' only as it is felt as yours. But it is felt as neither *by itself*, but only when 'owned' by our several remembering experiences, just as one undivided estate is owned by several heirs. . . . Since the acquisition of conscious quality on the part of an experience depends upon a context coming to it, it follows that (the pen-experience) can not strictly be called conscious at all."

This passage says nothing about any sort of mind; but it excites many questions. It declares that the pen-experience "in its original immediacy," "can not strictly be called conscious at all." Is it at that moment an "immediate" part of some unconscious "mind" or "stream"? Only "later," does it become "mine" and "felt as mine." What is the "me" of which it so becomes consciously "mine"? Inasmuch as, apparently, it "feels," is this "me" of itself a conscious mind? Apparently it is the "second experience" or "context" required for awareness of the pen-experience "to occur," and required to "own" and to "appropriate"

the pen-experience. But if this be the "me" that we seek, how does this "me" or "experience" differ from the pen-experience, both as regards "experience," and as regards "stuff"? If it be a context of awareness only, it can no more exist, according to James, than does consciousness. And if it be a "stuff" experience of one general sort with the pen-experience, and differ essentially from it only in performing an "act of appropriation," just what is this "second experience" that James so strangely fails to describe more definitely than as "context" and "owner"? In any case, what is "the mind" here involved? If it be just the pen-experience with awareness of its own being as the context, it does not require for this context any part of "the stream of thought" that James sometimes identified with "the human mind." Nevertheless, it is the precise equivalent of what James called "the mind" in an extremely important passage that I am soon to quote.

James, in his book, *The Meaning of Truth*, devotes a chapter to "The Function of Cognition." He starts it by staging a drama that in every virtual respect is a reproduction of that performed in expounding his doctrine regarding Consciousness. The new *dramatis personæ* are but virtually interchangeable substitutes for the old, or at least appear to be, until new questions rise. The old "pen-experience" becomes first an algebraic "*q*," then a concrete "paper-experience." And the old "second experience" or "context" (whose identity puzzled me) at least seems to make its bow merely under a new alias, "a feeling of *q*": at first, James creates it "in a little universe, all by itself"; then remarking that "there can be no 'feeling of *q*' without a *q* of which it should be the feeling," he creates the *q* that, when embodied, becomes "the paper" substitute for the "pen-experience" in its original immediacy and not at all conscious. Thus staged, here they stand, the two creations, each "in a little universe, all by itself," already for the play to begin!

Presto! Whether the "*q*" or the "feeling" pressed the button is concealed. But somehow "The Function of Cognition" presumably substituting for the old "act of addition" or "appropriative consciousness" transpires. The two creations, "the paper" and "the feeling," become "one identical fact" or "one experience" which James describes as follows: "The paper seen, and the seeing of it are only two names for one identical fact. . . . The paper is in the mind and the mind is around the paper, because paper and mind are only two names given *later* to the one experience. . . . *To know immediately, therefore, or intuitively, is for mental content and object to be identical.*"

This drama presumably furnishes a conscious mind in embryo; but it answers none of our questions and prompts others. Its last

sentence, which James emphasized by italics, unmistakably implies that unconscious experiences (like those of the pen and the paper before awareness was added to them) are mental *contents*, and are not *objects* of consciousness or awareness. But contents of what? From neither drama can one be sure that James conceived such unconscious experiences to be constituents of any mind or stream of any sort. And to be sure regarding what he conceived them to be contents of, one must study his writings more widely.

None of the quotations that I have made throws any convincing light on two great problems involved in any presumption of minds of any sort; namely, the problems of "many in one," and of "continuous existence." And in our hunt for what James conceived unconscious experiences to be contents of, let us first examine his notorious difficulties regarding "many in one"!

In his *Psychology* and elsewhere, James inveighed violently against "gluing" mental things together, for example, by "association," in pretended constitution of that unique oneness which characterizes the immediate field of consciousness of any mind. Yet James's method of enacting this oneness seems hardly to do more than substitute the word "addition" for "association" and "gluing." Nevertheless, the important facts for my present purpose are that James explicitly insisted upon this sort of unique oneness for his conscious minds (such as of which he declared, "the paper is in the mind and the mind around the paper"), but quite took for granted an equally unique though utterly different oneness of the respective unconscious pen and paper experiences; and in case that he did conceive a vast and varied manifold of likewise unconscious experiences to constitute any "mind" or "stream of thought" only parts of which should, occasionally and in successive islands, become endowed with the unique oneness of their conscious addition, he also quite took for granted whatever sort of oneness he conceived to be so constituted by that generally unconscious "mind" or "stream," thus leaving us uncertain as to how he conceived the contents of any unconscious pen- or paper-experience to be joined; as to how he conceived such unconscious experiences to be joined when forming any mind or stream; and as to how he divided his "one general sort of stuff" among "plural minds," either wholly, or with an incalculable remainder not in any mind.

The importance of these facts, within James's general teachings, is obscured within his two dramas, partly because he used only spacial experiences in expounding them; whereas, had he used a manifold of sounds in place of a pen, or of a rectangular paper, the problem of how many distinct sounds may be regarded as in any one mind or stream rather than in any other, save as the result of some consciously

uniting "act," would at least have been more likely to occur to anyone who, like James, had renounced all but empirical explanations of such problems. But because James's *q* algebraically stood as much for any unconscious manifold of sounds not displayed spacially as for any unconscious manifold of colors displayed spacially, we must ask: By what empirical right did James conceive unconscious spacially united "paper rectangles" to exist at all; or conceive numerically distinct "*q*'s" not spacially displayed to exist in any one mind or stream rather than in any other, or than in absolute separateness in no mind?

Moreover, having asked this pertinently of the problem of "many in one," there remains the problem of "continuous existence." Did James conceive all his universal stuff to exist eternally? Did he conceive the beginning and the end of whatever mind or stream he did conceive to exist simultaneously, its past and its future sections as well as his "specious present"? And if all the stream did not exist simultaneously, in what mind did James's unconscious things exist; and in what sense did their "flow" constitute either any conscious or any unconscious mind? Naïve men, rationalists, and followers of "the Absolute" at least attempt to make plain how questions like these are to be answered. But as nothing in all James's writings furnishes sure evidence for deciphering his undeniable inspiration, I now follow the only cue I can discover for guessing the root of his inveterate ambiguity—a root, perhaps, of which he was never aware.

## II

Can any man escape from his environment, wholly? James was born, bred, and lived in an environment and in an age of rationalism. My cue is my suspicion that James, in spite of his utmost endeavor, never fully escaped from rationalism.

James's prime resolve was to practise empiricism only. But to me he seems never to have escaped many habits unwittingly absorbed from his surroundings and readings. Among other evidences of this he seems at will to have used his "stuff" quite as any rationalist uses "phenomena," used his "feelings of relations" quite as any follower of Mr. Bradley uses "inconceivable" relations, and used his "experiences" quite as he accused Royce of using "the Absolute" or as a "mere reservoir of convenience."

Royce "conveniently" used innumerable phenomena all eternally "supported" in the Absolute. James as "conveniently" used innumerable "Berkeleyan" and "experienced" things all eternally "existing" somewhere. But though James renounced both "the Absolute" and "the Naïve Man's World," he seems blindly to have felt no need of stating precisely where, how, or by what right he conceived

his "convenient" things "to exist," or whether in some particular mind or "*ins blau hinein*."

Royce used innumerable phenomena all unconscious of themselves and severally united into many sorts of manifolds, each by some "act" of "the Absolute." James used innumerable "experiences" all unconscious of themselves and severally united into many sorts of manifolds, unconscious pens, papers, orchestrations, *etc.* But though he renounced "the Absolute" and resolved to practise empiricism only, he seems blindly to have felt no need of explaining how these unconscious manifolds could be conceived to be united spacially, numerically, or at all, otherwise than occasionally by some uniquely adding and consciousness-endowing "act" of some empirical "me" or "mind."

Royce used phenomena as "universals"; one served for all minds—literally one it should have been, since nothing (save "transcendental egos" and "relations") could be "plural" or "different" in itself, or unless "acted upon" by some ego. James used "experiences" precisely likewise whenever it suited him to do so. In explaining *How Two Minds Know The Same Thing* he just conveniently added "the same thing" to each mind, whereupon it became known as "one and the same thing," or as "two different things" accordingly as some "me" "acted upon" the two minds in exercise of some "feeling of relation."

Followers of Mr. Bradley use his "inconceivable" relations also as "universals." James used his "feelings of relation" likewise and as "inconceivably." In his *Psychology* and elsewhere, he declared that no two experiences ever are the same, or ever are in the same mind twice, or ever are in but the one mind. Nevertheless, James permitted himself at will to transgress all these declarations. Suppose several men including James simultaneously to have seen a Berkeleyan tiger charge from its farthest visible distance to an immediate foreground! James would have said that "as mental content" or as "things in themselves" his distant experience was as "different" from his glorious-sheen-in-tawny-and-black close-up experience, as a flyspeck from a mountain landscape or a county fair. Yet in successive breaths he would have called the flyspeck-tiger and the close-up tiger "as mental object or Berkeleyan thing," now "the same," now "different," now "one," now "plural," now "the same tiger or experience in different minds," now "different manifolds of different content in different minds," and in this last he merely would have changed "different" to "the same," if occasion suggested it. Here we recall that James declared of the paper-experience that "paper and mind are only two names given *later* to the one experience"; and that he commonly

declared that the Dipper Stars of the Great Bear are seven "only when counted." And if James had been asked for his warrant for all this sort of use of his "feelings of relation," I suspect that he would have replied as "conveniently" as Royce or any other rationalist.

James's later writings are replete with, seemingly, every conceivable "*q*," "feeling of," and "feeling of relation," and with every conceivable "me" to feel them and "own" them in uniquely united oneness. They provided him with a duplicate supply competent to every possible known thing and knowing thing. And with this more than rationalistic supply, James's problems in conscious addition, unconscious division, and plural cosmology were easy. He had but to clap together some universal "pen," some "feeling of" it, plentiful "feelings of relation," and innumerable "me's" for his universal formula of pen-cognition to be complete. If it happen to be a *sort* of pen that he saw, that pricked some blind man's finger, that some babe swallowed, that Roosevelt took to Africa, and that Cæsar used in his "still sleeping" past, James had but to add so many feelings of "the same" and of "mine" in order to make five "me's" conscious of the one "universal," timelessly stuck at the "common intersection" or cross-roads of five "streams of thought" or "minds." And if in such a "quasi chaos" of feelings of "mine," "yours," "Roosevelt's," "out to Africa," and "back to Cæsar" should rise innumerable feelings of "if," "and," "but," and "doubt" regarding who is who and what is what, there was always at hand "in the rush of the mind through its world of fringes and relations" (James's words) still another feeling—the all-satisfying feeling that "Whatever a man trowest is true."

In short, James's empiricism is one that can make all the furniture of the universe unconsciously exist in every conceivable manifold, both in innumerable minds simultaneously, and successively in the ever-varying medleys of their differently "flowing streams"; can make them all "felt" and "felt" in every conceivable relation by innumerable "occurring" and conscious-endowing "me's" in each of the innumerable plural "streams"; and at will can dump them all into his genetically primitive "quasi chaos" that is indefinitely conscious or unconscious, that evolves by no definable order of logic, of biology, or of nature, and that is neither empirical nor rationalistic, while as a "reservoir of convenience" it is only ignominiously less majestic than "the Absolute."

Nevertheless, my cue has led me neither to undervalue James's work nor to exaggerate its defects. Simply he undertook a task impossible for any one man or even any one generation of men to



complete. The Naïve Man did not become the Rationalist in a day; nor will the Rationalist become the Empiricist in a day—perhaps only the Rational Empiricist, ever. James's work will be lastingly momentous to the future of mankind, however it be named. And the highest tribute that mankind can pay to his instinctively penetrating genius is now to make his prophetic darkness clear, revealing the difficulties through which he staggered toward a dawn of incomparable promise.

### III

James's prime intention was to be empirical; and if my review of his work discovers it to have been successful wherever he succeeded in being empirical, and to have failed wherever he failed to be empirical, these discoveries will at least have the warrant of his premeditated judgment regarding the primary requirement of all philosophic procedure.

James began with unconscious "stuff." But no empiricist who declares that "the paper seen and the seeing of it . . . are one identical fact" can discover unconscious stuff in his own field of consciousness. To have begun empirically, James should have begun with a conscious *q*. Moreover, had he done this, he would have needed no "act" for adding awareness to the *q*. Also, having created a typical conscious *q* or "stuff-mind" in a universe all by itself, it could have remained from the beginning to the end of eternity absolutely unchanged; and this possibility should have warned James that consciousness is not likely to be any sort of "act," and that no conscious stuff-mind ever needs any "occasional" endowment of consciousness. Indeed, in any absolutely unchanging universe, no transpiring act of any sort whatsoever could be possible. Therefore, no empiricist should make use of any "act" whatsoever until he presumes to explain how one "conscious whole" is continuously succeeded by a different "conscious whole" in any sort of "stream." In any case, we discover that neither James's unconscious stuff, nor his consciousness endowing "acts of addition" have any empirical warrant.

Having wrongly begun his empirical task with unconscious stuff and rationalistic "acts" for occasionally endowing it with consciousness, James permitted himself to conceive his stuff to constitute uniquely united unconscious manifolds without need of any unifying "acts," and as no pure rationalist ever would do. That is to say, James made his *q* algebraic of every sort of manifold ever discovered in any uniquely united field of consciousness. Yet in nothing did James display his instinct for empiricism more, or

more crucially, than in pertinaciously insisting on the absolutely unique oneness of each and every "conscious whole."

Moreover, had James perceived the need of distinguishing plural minds in a universe constituted of one general sort of stuff as clearly as he perceived the need of distinguishing plural egos within the Absolute, he would have perceived that a conscious *q* mind constituted by any manifold of stuff uniquely united in a "conscious whole," once clearly conceived to be the ultimate type of all egos, minds or me's, furnishes precisely the distinction of them, one from another, never before made definitely conceivable.

In the precise meaning that the manifold of each stuff-mind is "one conscious whole," plural stuff-minds are not "one conscious whole." The absolutely unique junction of stuff in one conscious whole is the indispensable and ultimate distinction of a stuff-mind; the absolute absence of any such junction between them is the indispensable and ultimate distinction of plural stuff-minds; James's unconscious stuff had no empirically warranted junction or disjunction; and neither any unconscious mind nor any unconscious stuff has any empirical warrant.

*Every abstract prime, causal or logical, is pure algebra, till "stuffed."* "Soul," "ego," "center of apperception," "energy," "unconscious space," every sort of "me," "thing," "act," and "relation" is pure algebra, till "stuffed." And if there be anything "Unknowable," these unstuffed things should have been the "unknowables" of Kant and Spencer—not the stuff that in a conscious whole is the only sort of "knowable" of which any "mind" is ever empirically conscious. This is what James blindly struggled to say, but perpetually contradicted.

James also insisted pertinaciously that each conscious field "as a whole" is continuously followed by each succeeding field "as a whole." But had he not conveniently and virtually conceived his conscious stuff and things to exist eternally, his simile for the mind would not have been a "stream of thought," but a movie-show—a movie-show mind, all of whose past contents have ceased to exist absolutely, all of whose future contents do not yet exist, and whose present field is absolutely all that any mind, ego, or me, ever empirically is—a movie-show in which each momentarily existing "whole" transforms absolutely and continuously to the next following "whole."

Such a mind is not without mysteries. Conscious existence is a mystery, but unconscious existence is a greater and added mystery. Conscious unity of any manifold is a mystery, but any sort of united unconscious manifold is a greater and added mystery—including alike that of any unconscious "stream of thought" and that of any unconscious space. Absolute transformation of any whole, or of any

part of any whole, is a mystery, but it is less a mystery than any sort of "gluing," either by unconscious space or by any rationalistic "act." The continuity of this absolute transformation is a mystery, but it is less a mystery than either an eternal atom, or any "unstuffed" ego, or anything that is always both "the same" and "different."

*A conscious unity of manifold stuff, absolutely and continuously transforming!* This is the typical mind that James's titanic struggle reveals, when stripped of rationalistic ambiguities. Its mysteries are the simplest and fewest of ultimate mysteries; no others are needed. It suffices for his "Plural Universe," "all of one general sort of stuff." It suffices for science, without the added mysteries of "an unconscious spacial plenum," and without ignoring all that psychology and philosophy have ever accomplished. It suffices for psychology, without any multitudinous and insolvable algebra of unstuffed "faculties," "acts," and "relations." And it suffices for all philosophy or cosmology, without any "reservoir of convenience" filled with Unstuffed Unknowables.

#### IV

But how can any such Jamesesque mind know any other such mind, or what other such minds of various species constitute the plural Universe? For this question, as for all exact discussion of cosmology and of epistemology, mutually exclusive definitions of "conscious" and "know" are indispensable. Therefore, for my present writing, I dogmatically declare that the proper meaning of each of these two words is absolutely unique, and different from that of the other. Every mind is conscious of its present, consciously united self and never is conscious of anything else. Every mind knows other things, but never knows its present self.

I have spent years in completing for publication an epistemology conforming to this dogma. But for present writing, I simply declare that any mind knows its past, knows any other mind, knows any part of any other mind, and knows the species of any other mind all in one general way that has two modes, instinct or intuition, and reason or inference.

James refused to infer that the atoms, ether, and vast plenum of modern physics exist—"as yet" or otherwise than as "permanent possibilities" and "conceptually." He refused to infer their existence even in any guise of his mental stuff. Nevertheless, he explicitly declared for mental genesis. He himself suggested that spacial existence has some sort of genesis from "crudely voluminous" existence. And as the result of this suggestion, the progressive genesis in

each human mind of homogeneous undifferentiated existence or "presentation," to numerical presentation and thence to spacial presentation all by one common law of conditional growth, now stands unchallenged, save by human inertia. All alike are warrants of inference, and are as truthful warrants for inferring something, essentially replacing the entire plenum of present physics, as for inferring the mind of one's wife or son.

James's vision of the human mind was clearer than that of any previous man. But his vision of the universe was densely fogged by his rationalism. His type of universe, like that of every rationalist, is rooted in the ancient belief that "Man's soul is the center and image of God's purpose." He, like Fechner, conceived the planets to be godlike minds; but he was intolerant of existing atoms, and would have been horrified at evolutionary minds that, like his "mind around the paper," should essentially embrace the great nebulae and vast interstellar spaces.

But why should any man any longer refuse to infer something in some species of mind from the entire gamut of our Berkeleyan experiences? How can any scientist now fail to do this, unless to be a scientist is to be unmindful of all that psychology and philosophy have accomplished? And how can any psychologist or philosopher now fail to do this, unless to be a psychologist or a philosopher is to be unmindful of all that science has accomplished?

Previous to Berkeley, all men and all animals instinctively lived by this sort of universal inference, and doubtfully could have evolved without this instinct. It has the warrant of the entire biologic instinct of the ages. And its abandonment by modern rationalism has no other warrant than Man's sophisticated exaltation of his own image.

Once accept James's Plural Universe all of one general sort of stuff, and the Jamesesque mind, patiently understood, becomes the sufficient warrant to future cosmologists for inferring how one mind knows any other mind, what species of minds exist, and what sort of consciously united manifolds constitute each of these species.

## V

James did more for solving the future problems of mankind than his school, let alone his generation, yet appreciates. The only adequate memorial to his genius can be to complete his marvellously prophetic vision.

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